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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that government responsibilities in education and the strong connection of Americans with their public schools are being tested, as a network of Religious Right groups, free-market economists, ultraconservative columnists, and others use vouchers as a vehicle to achieve their ultimate goal of privatizing education. Their long-term goal is to make all schooling an activity supplied by private sources. The movement believes that targeted voucher plans give them a foot in the door toward achieving this goal. The paper discusses the deeper agenda; the incremental achievement of privatization; roots of the voucher movement; other privatization strategies; spinning the voucher message; what privatization would mean; the education market; those left behind by privatization; and the unreceptive public. The paper explains that many pro-privatization groups offer two messages (one for committed followers and another for the broader public). It notes that many private schools are unlikely to accommodate significant numbers of additional students in a privatized system, cautioning that vouchers can lead to hastily created "fly-by-night" private schools unable to provide quality education. An appendix lists elective officials, right-wing leaders, and other prominent individuals who have signed the Alliance for the Separation of School and State's anti-public school proclamation or publicly offered support to the Alliance. (Contains 178 endnotes.) (SM)

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SPECIAL REPORT

PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY FOUNDATION

The Voucher Veneer

The Deeper Agenda to Privatize Public Education

July, 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, governmental responsibilities in education and the strong connection that Americans have with their public schools are being put to a serious test. A network of Religious Right groups, free-market economists, ultraconservative columnists and others are using vouchers as a vehicle to achieve their ultimate goal of privatizing education. Their embrace of vouchers reflects their view that to be successful, privatization must be achieved incrementally. The long-term goal is to make all schooling an activity supplied by private sources: for-profit management companies, religious organizations and home schools. The movement believes that targeted voucher plans, such as those in Florida, Milwaukee and Cleveland, give them a foot in the door en route to achieving this goal. While many of those who want to privatize education choose their words very carefully, others are more candid about their goals. The Heartland Institute's Joseph Bast has urged others who share his group's extreme agenda to be patient. "The complete privatization of schooling might be desirable, but this objective is politically impossible for the time being. Vouchers are a type of reform that is possible now, and would put us on the path to further privatization."

1. ***Vouchers are part of a broader strategy by some to privatize public schools.***
Joel Belz, publisher of *World*—a Religious Right magazine—wrote a column several years ago sympathizing with those who oppose vouchers because they don't want government to play *any* role in education. He wrote: "If [supporting vouchers] helps bring down the statist system, *which it will*, it will be worth the temporary compromise."(emphasis added) Supporting vouchers now, Belz argued, would help pro-privatization groups in the long run "gain a larger strategic advantage."

2. ***Voucher supporters are pushing their agenda from the highest levels.***
Privatization advocates have made a serious effort to bring about change, no longer from outside the system but from within the corridors of power. U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo, R-Colo., after his appointment to the House education committee said, "I think it's a lot easier to kill the beast when you get in the cave." Recently, the Bush Administration appointed Nina Shokraii Rees, a staunch voucher advocate, to head DOE's Office of Innovation and Improvement.

3. ***Many pro-privatization groups offer two messages: one for committed followers and another for the broader public.***
For example, the Florida-based James Madison Institute has stated that it "believes that parents should have the freedom to make decisions in the best interests of their children." Most Americans, including those who strongly support public education, would likely agree with this vague statement. These words, of course, leave unmentioned the fact that the James Madison Institute's education policy director has signed a proclamation that calls for scrapping the public education system.

4. ***Many existing private schools are unlikely to accommodate significant numbers of additional students in a privatized system.***

Chester E. Finn, Jr., who heads the Fordham Foundation, notes that it is generally hard to find private school leaders "who want their schools to grow, to open additional campuses, to recruit more clients." Finn also recently admitted that "there aren't enough private schools to go around" for would-be voucher students. Indeed, a massive number of schools would have to be built to replace all or most of the 92,000 public schools operating across America.

5. ***Vouchers can lead to hastily created 'fly-by-night' private schools unable to provide children with a quality education.***

Concerns about quality are magnified by the fact that private and religious schools are not held accountable in the same manner as public schools. In fact, the CATO Institute's David Salisbury recently argued that private schools' ability to disregard state standards is "the very basis for school choice."

6. ***Schools may not be just another economic market.***

The voucher movement largely owes its beginnings to economist Milton Friedman's beliefs that the private sector delivers goods and services more efficiently than public institutions. Ironically, some of the conditions in public schools identified by critics as problems are rooted in the dynamics of the free market system they praise. Large schools were inspired largely by private enterprise, which has long encouraged "economies of scale." Boston University professor Philip Tate has observed that rigid class schedules, reliance on test scores and other traits of public schools "were instituted in the name of efficiency" and created a "factory model" of schooling.

7. ***A privatized system of education could leave too many children behind.***

It is likely that a privatized education system will cater to those students who are believed to be easier or less expensive to educate. The Heritage Foundation has expressed hope that "vouchers could limit how much taxpayers must pay to educate the disabled and begin a movement toward cost containment." A survey by the U.S. Department of Education of private schools in large inner-cities found that between 70 and 85 percent of schools would "definitely or probably" not be willing to participate in a voucher program if they were required to accept "students with special needs such as learning disabilities, limited English proficiency or low achievement." Among religious schools, 86 percent expressed this same unwillingness to participate.

8. ***The public supports public education.***

In a national poll this year, Americans chose "reforming the existing public school system" over "finding an alternative" to the current system by a 69-to-27 percent margin. In last year's annual Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup poll on education, 71 percent of public school parents gave a grade of A or B to the school attended by their oldest child.

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I. Introduction

Public schools have long reflected Americans' core values—the understanding that education must not only prepare young people for the workplace, but also help them become responsible citizens in a free and democratic society. For most people, public schools remain a source of pride and hope, helping to level the playing field for children from incredibly diverse racial, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic groups. Last year, Hodding Carter III wrote, "The greatest single innovation of this democratic republic has been the idea of the public school."[1]

Even amid concerns that some public schools—mainly those serving low-income students—are struggling, Americans continue to view public schools as a defining hub for their communities. In spring 2001, a national poll found that Americans ranked public schools as "the most important public institution in the community" by at least a five-to-one margin over hospitals, churches and other institutions.[2] This year, a poll reinforced the nation's support for public schools, finding that Americans identify education more than any other public service as a priority worth shielding from state budget cuts.[3]

When former Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote the majority opinion in the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, he observed that education "is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments."[4] Since the 1950s, bipartisan majorities in Congress have given the federal government an important role in funding and sustaining programs and reforms. While some interest groups bristled at efforts to increase the federal role in education, they consistently upheld and affirmed the active roles of state and local governments to fund and operate public schools. Until recently, the debate was centered not on *whether* government had a responsibility for funding and facilitating education, but, rather, on *how* these responsibilities should be divided among local, state, and federal governments. Times have changed.

Today, governmental responsibilities in education and the strong connection that Americans have with their public schools are being put to a serious test. A network of Religious Right groups, free-market economists, ultraconservative columnists and others are using vouchers as a vehicle to achieve their ultimate goal of privatizing education. Their embrace of vouchers reflects their view that privatization must be achieved incrementally.

Last year, Joseph Bast, president of the Heartland Institute, called vouchers the "way to privatize schooling."[5] Bast added, "Pilot voucher programs for the urban poor will lead the way to statewide universal voucher plans. Soon, most government schools will be converted into private schools or simply close their doors."[6] The Heartland Institute's Web site calls public schools "islands of socialism in a sea of competition and choice."[7] Despite the group's extreme rhetoric, the Heartland Institute has succeeded in forming a "board of legislative advisors" that includes more than 240 elected officials from nearly all 50 states.[8] The goal of pro-privatization groups was summed up recently by a spokesperson for the organization: "In the long run, vouchers will pave the way to market education."[9] In some cases, proponents don't bother to mask their ultimate agenda and use the terms "vouchers" and privatization interchangeably. For example, the

Constitutional Heritage Institute argued that vouchers will succeed "because a privatized system of universal education" will outperform public schools.[10]

Vouchers are part of a broader strategy promoted by these would-be privatizers, who have also called for weakening or repealing compulsory school attendance laws, teacher certification requirements and other laws and standards that are the linchpins of public education. In 2001, for example, an article by the Mackinac Institute endorsed "privatizing or even loosening teacher certification ...."[11]

Vouchers are part of a broader strategy by some to privatize public schools.

While some pro-privatization groups also support more mainstream proposals such as charter schools, such support serves two purposes. First, it makes these groups appear less extreme. As Education Week explained, "If only for pragmatic reasons, many groups that once supported vouchers are now throwing their weight behind the charter movement ... In part, it's because charters are politically palatable to a wider audience."[12] Second, supporting charter schools is, itself, part of this incremental strategy. David Brennan, a wealthy Ohio businessman who helped rally support for a voucher law has said, "Charters are a way station on the way to getting full choice through vouchers."[13]

II. A Deeper Agenda

A growing circle of public school critics—including Milton Friedman, who first conceived the notion of school vouchers—is using the "school choice" banner to begin challenging the very existence of public schools. This movement aims to establish universal voucher plans that would divert public tax dollars to pay for private schooling.[14] Indeed, the long-term goal is to make all schooling an activity supplied by private sources: for-profit management companies, religious organizations and home schools. And the movement believes that targeted voucher plans, such as those in Florida, Milwaukee and Cleveland, give them a foot in the door en route to achieving this goal.

The far-right Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE) has called voucher plans "a first step" to making vouchers "universally available" to all parents.[15] A look at CSE's board of directors shows the organization is well-connected. It was founded by right-wing donor David Koch and has been funded by the Scaife and Olin foundations as well as a number of major corporate contributors.[16]

Pro-voucher columnist John L. Perry has offered a similar assessment. "Indeed, the choice to use a voucher to move a child from the dead-end alley of a failed school into the first-rate educational environment of a non-public school, parochial or non-parochial, is the very instrument needed to bring about the fall, demise and replacement of the entire failed public-education charade, from kindergarten through graduate school," Perry wrote recently.[17] Last year, one of the largest Religious Right groups in the country called for "dumping the failing and fatally flawed public schools."[18] And, last July, syndicated columnist Joseph Farah addressed his column to public school parents. "If your kids are in government school," he stated, "you are part of the problem."[19]

For many of these radical voices, vouchers serve as a convenient means to further their broader anti-government, tax-cutting agenda. While many voucher proponents insist their goal is not to harm the public schools in any way, other supporters make little effort to conceal their hostility to public schools. Three years ago, as Californians prepared to vote on a voucher initiative, John Gizzi, political editor of Human Events,[20] could hardly contain himself. Anticipating the potential impact if the initiative were to pass, Gizzi wrote, "If every single California student takes a voucher, leaving the public schools with empty buildings, the state and its taxpayers will save billions."[21]

For these groups, vouchers are merely the opening salvo in a lengthier war aimed at privatizing America's educational system. While some pro-privatization voices speak of voucher programs as the best and most practical strategy, others deliver a message that sounds more academic—almost as if it were lifted straight from an economics textbook.

According to an article published by the Cato Institute, a privatized educational system would create "market" conditions that mean "some government schools would 'go out of business.'"[22] A column in the Future of Freedom Foundation contended that the "free market" would enable parents to "select the best educational vehicle for each of their children."[23] Earlier this year, a like-minded columnist asserted, "The answer lies in working to replace public (education) with private, consumer-responsive, unregulated, independent education."(emphasis added)[24]

Earlier this year, Paul Mero, president of the Sutherland Institute, a right-wing think tank, urged Utah to create a state education system that would effectively turn public schools into a place of last resort for poor children. Mero explained his plan: "Self-reliant families and the rest of society would continue to assist dependent families (just as we do with traditional welfare) in the government support system."[25] SchoolReformers.com urges "market-based" reforms in education.[26] SchoolReformers.com is largely funded by the Chicago-based Henry Hazlitt Foundation, whose namesake embraced extreme free-market views. "It is fashionable to say today," Hazlitt wrote in the 1970s, "that "society" must solve the problem of poverty. But basically each individual—or at least each family—must solve its own problem of poverty."[27]

As education writer Ann Bastian has noted, the movement to privatize education fits comfortably with these groups' other goals: "Privatizing public education is the center piece, the grand prize, of the right wing's overall agenda to dismantle social entitlements and government responsibility for social needs."[28] Indeed, many who support privatizing public education also believe that government should withdraw from or not address a variety of other public concerns, including health care, environmental quality, and equal opportunity. One example is the columnist and lecturer Dinesh D'Souza. In a 1995 book, D'Souza downplayed the impact of racism, arguing that any ill effects of racial bias against African-Americans will end once "blacks as a group can show they are capable of performing competitively in schools and the work force ..."[29] — an assessment that is not only patronizing, but also ignores the fact that genuine competition can't occur without a level playing field.

III. The Incremental Strategy

Supporters of a fully privatized system of education have recognized that their goal must be achieved incrementally.

Joel Belz, publisher of World—a Religious Right magazine—wrote a column several years ago sympathizing with those who oppose vouchers because they don't want government to play any role in education. "Yes, it would normally be unwise to let the state gain any leverage at all in private-school efforts," he wrote. "But if [supporting vouchers] helps bring down the statist system, which it will, it will be worth the temporary compromise—and the short-term risks."(emphasis added)[30] Supporting vouchers now, Belz argued, would help pro-privatization groups in the long run "gain a larger strategic advantage."[31]

Likewise, the Heartland Institute's Joseph Bast has urged others who share his group's extreme agenda to be patient. "The complete privatization of schooling might be desirable, but this objective is politically impossible for the time being. Vouchers are a type of reform that is possible now, and would put us on the path to further privatization."(emphasis added)[32]

Such candid and revealing comments contrast sharply with the public message of many pro-voucher groups that vouchers will actually help strengthen public schools by forcing them to improve through the magic of competition and market forces. Colorado recently passed a law providing for a pilot voucher program. On the day the law was signed, pro-voucher Independence Institute President Jon Caldara told a reporter, "This is just the beginning."[33]

Views such as these may explain Polly Williams' change of heart. Williams, the single mother and former Wisconsin legislator who sponsored the 1990 Milwaukee voucher law, was once the toast of right-wing groups who praised her efforts.[34] But Williams later distanced herself from these groups as she grew suspicious that they were trying to hijack the voucher movement as a cover for advancing their own agenda. "Too many people in the voucher crowd exploit low-income black children," she said, adding that "what they really have in mind is bringing in a Trojan horse."[35]

The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), a high visibility, African-American voucher advocacy organization, appears to be one of the Trojan horses providing cover for the deeper agenda of privatization of which Williams spoke. Friedman's own foundation—the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation—is one of several right-wing foundations that are bankrolling BAEO's activities. While BAEO claims to support efforts that would provide vouchers only to low-income families, several of the foundations that fund this group have a much more radical vision for education and have also lent their support to affirmative-action rollbacks and other efforts that would trouble many African-Americans.[36] A case in point is the Bradley Foundation[37] a major financial supporter of BAEO. Other recipients of Bradley funding include:

- The Heartland Institute which believes that voucher programs such as Cleveland's are the springboard for universal voucher plans that will eventually cause public schools to be "converted into private schools or simply close their doors."[38]

- Charles Murray, the co-author of the highly controversial 1994 book The Bell Curve, which suggested that African-Americans are intellectually inferior to whites. Murray received nearly $1 million from Bradley. Michael Joyce, who formerly headed the Bradley Foundation, was specifically cited in The Bell Curve's acknowledgments.[39]

- Anti-affirmative action groups, which includes an organization formed by Ward Connerly, the activist who led the successful effort to eliminate California's affirmative action programs in 1996.[40]

- The Free Congress Foundation (FCF), which has urged Americans to "separate" themselves from public schools by creating or supporting "parallel institutions" such as home schooling.[41] FCF's president, Paul Weyrich, coined the name — Moral Majority and helped formulate strategy for the group.[42]

IV. The Roots of the Voucher Movement

In 1955, Milton Friedman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, first proposed a system of educational vouchers.[43] This proposal reflects Friedman's over-arching extreme free-market philosophies.

The notion that there are core responsibilities—such as education—that a society should share collectively is simply an anathema to Friedman and his cohorts. Friedman dismissed the view that individuals have a larger responsibility to create or work through public institutions to contribute to the common good and criticized the intent of John F. Kennedy's famous exhortation: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country," stating it "expresses a relationship between the citizen and his government" that is not "worthy of the ideals of free men in a free society."[44]

While many voucher proposals today are targeted to serve students in poverty or those in low-performing school districts, Friedman's original proposal envisioned a voucher system that was universal, open even to students from the wealthiest families.[45]

The 1950s to 2002

Friedman's vision was seized upon very quickly, but the economist was probably surprised by both the source of and motivation behind this interest: Southern legislators who were intent on maintaining racial segregation despite the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown decision. In 1956 and 1960, the Virginia Legislature passed tuition-grant laws permitting parents to use tax-funded vouchers to send their children to private, non-sectarian schools—so-called "segregation academies"[46] or "white flight" academies.

In the mid-1960s, the federal Office of Economic Opportunity drafted an experimental voucher plan, and several cities and communities were asked to take part. Only the

public schools in Alum Rock, California, chose to participate, and the district eventually abandoned the voucher plan after it produced disappointing results.[47]

A 1971 panel of the Nixon administration's Presidential Commission on School Finance recommended public tax funding of religious schools, an idea that led to the coining of the term "parochiaid." In 1975, the Heritage Foundation began providing a platform for vouchers when it sponsored a debate that featured the issue of private-school vouchers and student attendance laws.[48]

In 1981, vouchers gained new momentum with the election of Ronald Reagan to the White House. That same year, the Heritage Foundation proposed a federal program giving vouchers to parents whose children participated in some Title I programs.[49] Also in 1981, a top-ranking Catholic education official entered the national debate by calling vouchers "the ideal American way for everybody."[50] In 1988, former Education Secretary William Bennett encouraged the church to amplify its support for vouchers, exhorting Catholic educators to "seek out the poor, the disadvantaged ... and take them in, educate them, and then ask society for fair recompense for your efforts."[51]

The pro-voucher group, Learn, Inc., was launched in 1982, and its 20-member board of directors included Chester E. Finn, Jr., who now heads the Fordham Foundation.[52] In 1984, Tennessee Governor and future Education Secretary Lamar Alexander publicly endorsed a school voucher system, declaring that vouchers "would straighten public education right up."[53]

In 1983, President Reagan established the National Commission on Excellence in Education that issued its report, A Nation At Risk. Although vouchers were a favorite of the Reagan administration, they were never endorsed by the '83 Commission. In fact, nowhere within the 2,309 words of A Nation at Risk's detailed recommendations are the words "voucher" or "choice" even mentioned.[54] Education analyst Gerald W. Bracey has noted that conservatives "hated" the report because it did not address their favorite education-related issues: vouchers, tuition tax credits and school prayer.[55]

Starting with Michigan in 1970, voters in various states have defeated eight referenda that would either have created or permitted private-school voucher programs.[56] In California (1981) and Colorado (1984), voucher supporters failed to gather sufficient signatures to place voucher initiatives on state ballots.[57] The movement's breakthrough came in 1990 when the Wisconsin legislature enacted a voucher law specifically for students in Milwaukee's public schools. Five years later, a second state voucher law was approved in Ohio. The voucher law was specifically written to target public school students in Cleveland. Florida followed by enacting a voucher program in 1999 and Colorado passed a voucher law earlier this year.[58]

The Friedman Legacy

The common thread running through voucher proposals introduced in the states during recent decades has been the language used by proponents, a language borrowed largely from Friedman's frequent articles and lectures. A common theme of Friedman's and his

present-day followers is that the private sector delivers goods and services more efficiently than public institutions.

Friedman has never fully considered the marketplace's impact on the critical issue of equity. For example, when different students attend different schools, the resources and other qualities of those schools can vary widely and have significant, long-term consequences for these students' future and their ability to lead successful, responsible lives.

Friedman seems to believe that issues of equity will somehow solve themselves as reflected in his 1962 book, Capitalism and Freedom.[59] In fact, Friedman has long viewed equity as an obstacle, writing that "it would be difficult to carry [school choice] very far" under the public school system because "of the obligation to provide every child with a place."

Last year, Friedman cited the Supreme Court's ruling in the Cleveland voucher program as a sign that the country is "more and more approaching the tipping point" for the acceptance of vouchers.[60] However, For example, while Friedman argued in the 1960s that public and private schools should "compete on an equal level,"[61] none of the existing state voucher laws requires participating private schools to comply with all of the accountability standards, financial disclosure rules, state testing requirements and other mandates to which public schools are held. In fact, voucher supporters have steadfastly opposed efforts to place private and public schools on this level playing field.

"It would be difficult to carry [school choice] very far" under the public school system because "of the obligation to provide every child with a place."
Economist Milton Friedman
Father of the Voucher Movement

V. Other Privatization Strategies

The Alliance Proclamation

Even as they work closely to advance private-school voucher legislation, a number of leaders of ultraconservative free-market groups and the Religious Right are employing a host of parallel strategies to privatize education. Some of these strategies are fairly simple. For example, the Alliance for the Separation of School and State (www.sepschool.org) has been collecting signatures for its proclamation: "I proclaim publicly that I favor ending government involvement in education."[62] Although ultraconservative groups have long argued against permitting a larger federal role in providing funds or setting standards for education, the Alliance's statement goes dramatically farther by opposing any government role in education. The Alliance's Web site describes the organization's goal as "separating schools from federal, state, and local government involvement in attendance, financing, content, and teaching methods."[63] In 1997, the Alliance's leader, Marshall Fritz, urged participants at the group's third major conference to join him "in the only organization that works for the real solution—to get government completely out of education."[64] Fritz holds fervently anti-government views on a variety of issues and

has even cited child labor laws and seat-belt laws as examples of ways in which "parents have abdicated to politicians their duty of birthright and authority."[65]

Leaders of the Religious Right movement view public schools as obstructing their ability to advance their positions on evolution, school prayer, homosexuality and other issues.

While the Alliance might appear to be just a fringe group, its activities have been publicized by the Heritage Foundation,[66] and the Alliance's proclamation has been endorsed by a number of elected officials and leaders of right-wing and extreme free-market groups. The Alliance's pro-privatization proclamation also has been signed by a number of prominent figures in the Religious Right. (For an extensive list of prominent signers of the Alliance's proclamation, see Appendix I.)

One of the signers was R.J. Rushdoony, who, until his death three years ago, was a leader of the radical Christian Reconstructionist movement.[67] Rushdoony's writings, which have influenced many Religious Right leaders, voice approval for some forms of slavery, declare that gossip should be illegal, and label gay people as "a dangerous people."[68] Many decades ago, before key court rulings ended the practice, churches in some communities literally "ran the public schools," Rushdoony once told an interviewer, adding that the arrangement "worked out beautifully."[69]

The Religious Right's antipathy for public education is nothing new. Frustrated in their efforts to gain leverage over public school policies and curricula, During the early days of the Moral Majority, the Rev. Jerry Falwell effectively declared war on public schools. "I hope I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we won't have any public schools," Falwell wrote. "The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them."[70] Similar views have been expressed by televangelist Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition. "Abolish the public schools," Robertson exhorted.[71] In 2002, the American Family Association published an article on its Web site—under the sub-headline "Abolish the Public Schools"—stating, "We can solve the problem of angry parents and poor education by dumping the failing and fatally flawed public schools."[72]

Working Within the Corridors of Power

After years of proposing to weaken or even abolish the U.S. Department of Education and other agencies or bodies that facilitate public education, pro-privatization forces have in recent years adopted a new tactic. Soon after he was first elected, U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo, R-Colorado, who supports school privatization, hinted at this tactic when he explained why his appointment to the House education committee would advance his agenda. "I think it's a lot easier to kill the beast when you get in the cave," he said.[73]

To help them "kill the beast," privatization advocates have made a serious effort to bring about change, no longer from outside the system but from within the corridors of power. Nowhere is this strategy more apparent than in the U.S. Department of Education (DOE),

whose character and activities have changed significantly under President Bush. The Bush administration has placed vouchers high on the list of their priorities. This is reflected by Bush's appointment of Nina Shokraii Rees to head DOE's Office of Innovation and Improvement.[74] Rees held senior positions at the Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Justice, organizations that have made supporting vouchers a centerpiece of their agendas.[75] Rees has written dozens of on Heritage's behalf endorsing voucher proposals in education.[76]

Voucher supporters are pushing their agenda from the highest levels.

Last fall, the Bush administration's DOE decided to promote the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) by awarding grants to groups or individuals with strong ties to the voucher movement. In October 2002, DOE awarded $600,000 to BAEO to pay for a communications campaign to "help parents in four cities (Dallas, Detroit, Philadelphia and Milwaukee) learn about all the educational options [under NCLB] that are available for their children."[77] BAEO Chairman Howard Fuller is the former Milwaukee schools superintendent who invited researcher Paul T. Hill, a privatization enthusiast, to address the school district's administrators. A report written by Hill details how to replace "the entire existing public education governance system" with a contracting system.[78]

Also in October 2002, DOE awarded $4 million to Brighter Choice Charter Schools, which will use some of the funds for an advertising campaign in Albany, N.Y., to inform parents that they can transfer their children out of low-performing schools under NCLB.[79] The founder of Brighter Choice, Tom Carroll, is also the president of the Foundation for Education Reform and Accountability—an avid proponent of vouchers and private-school tax credits.[80] Carroll also founded Change-NY, a group that supported privately funded vouchers and was highly critical of public schools.[81]

Although the BAEO and Brighter Choice grants do not fund private-school voucher efforts, both grants significantly raise the profile and credibility of voucher supporters. Moreover, at a time when the administration is proposing deep cuts in many federal education programs, these grants are a waste of money.[82] Under NCLB, public schools are already required to provide information on school options to parents. These grants both divert public funding away from the classroom—where it is urgently needed—and publicize targeted NCLB provisions that may well serve as the prelude to the administration's push for private-school vouchers.

At the federal and state level, voucher supporters have even sought to co-opt efforts to enhance school accountability as a way to advance their agenda. Last December, Merrick Carey — head of the Lexington Institute — noted, "A very interesting back door approach to school choice has developed in the standards and accountability movement, and it is on prominent display here in Virginia, as well as in President Bush's new education law."[83] This manipulation of the accountability issue was also used in Colorado, which enacted a voucher law earlier this year. Two years ago, an article in the School Choice Advocate, the newsletter of the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation

reported: "Rachel Nance, Senior Education Policy Advisor for [Colorado] Governor Owens, reports that the motive behind the school accountability reports is to 'greatly enhance and build pressure for school choice.'"[84]

The Religious Right's 'Removal' Campaigns

A number of Religious Right leaders have joined free-market groups in advancing the goals of privatization through universal voucher programs. But while vouchers are an example of efforts that seek to advance privatization by changing the legal landscape, there is yet another strategy that several key figures in the Religious Right have embraced—an orchestrated, national campaign that urges parents to remove their children from public education. While universal vouchers and similar approaches advance privatization by changing the legal landscape, "removal" campaigns seek to change the political landscape. By dramatically downsizing the constituency of public schools, a mass exodus campaign would reduce public schools' ability to mobilize support for funding and reforms. Over time, this could lead to a de facto privatized system.

- Citizens for Excellence in Education, based in California, has initiated a program called "Rescue 2010" that urges all Christian parents to take their children out of public schools "as soon as it is feasible and possible." In a 1998 fundraising letter for Rescue 2010, CEE founder Robert Simonds wrote that "it is a massive job to get Christians to transfer their darling children to Christian or home schools, but it can be done."[85]

- Directed by E. Ray Moore, Exodus 2000, a campaign similar to Rescue 2010, established a Web site urging Christian parents to abandon public schools. Moore's effort has received publicity and support from D. James Kennedy, a Florida televangelist and leader in the Religious Right movement.[86]

- Under the leadership of its founder and president, Dr. James Dobson, Focus on the Family, echoed the messages of other removal campaigns. Speaking on his daily radio program Dobson stated, "In the state of California, if I had a child there, I wouldn't put the youngster in a public school ... I think it's time to get our kids out."[87]

- Talk-show host Laura Schlessinger lent her support to the removal campaign in April 2002. "Take your kids out of public schools," Schlessinger told her radio audience of an estimated 15 million listeners.[88]

These "removal" advocates have also received support from others such as Marshall Fritz of the Alliance for the Separation of School and State who praised Dobson for his "courageous and insightful" statement.[89] Columnist Joseph Farah has also urged parents to withdraw their children from public schools, acknowledging that "I am promoting a radical idea here." Farah added that parents whose children attend public schools should understand "why I don't want my kids anywhere near your kids."[90]

VI. Spinning the Voucher Message

While many of those who want to privatize education are incredibly candid about their goals, others choose their words more carefully. In an Orlando Sentinel commentary, one educator noted that pro-privatization groups are "in a complicated bind. In order to privatize education, you need political power. To get political power, you have to be elected to public office … (but) putting the public schools out of business … isn't much of a vote-getter." To be successful, the educator continued, pro-privatization forces have "to come across as a strong supporter of public education."[91]

While their more public messages are often carefully nuanced, right-wing groups hold nothing back when they are communicating directly to the faithful.

Multiple Messages

Some pro-privatization groups offer two messages: one for committed followers and another for the broader public that sounds somewhat mainstream. On its Web site, for example, the Florida-based James Madison Institute has stated that it "believes that parents should have the freedom to make decisions in the best interests of their children."[92] Most Americans, including those who strongly support public education, would likely agree with this vague statement. These words, of course, leave unmentioned the fact that the James Madison Institute's education policy center's director has signed a proclamation that calls for scrapping the public education system.[93]

These messages assail public schools with vicious and shrill language. In recent years, these inflammatory attacks have carried such headlines as "It's Time to Put Public Education Behind Us" and "Death to the Schools."[94] In the lexicon of the privatizers, public schools are "government schools," the educational process—at least in public schools—is "compulsory schooling," and the students are "its conscripted subjects" who need to be freed from "educational slavery."[95] An article published last fall by the Ludwig von Mises Institute complained that public schools produce hundreds of thousands of "misfits (who) fill out the ranks of petty criminals, welfare recipients, drug users, and beggars of one form or another."[96]

Some public schools are clearly falling short. There are serious issues that parents, teachers, civic leaders and other stakeholders must confront in helping public schools effectively educate students in these communities. But instead of participating constructively in this debate, supporters of privatization are increasingly using weak or one-sided analysis to declare public schools unfixable. These vitriolic attacks contribute nothing to the search for consensus; in fact, they reveal a deep-seated desire by these critics to see public schools fail. One pro-privatization organization has stated current reforms have been "failing for over a century and are doomed to fail again."[97]

Similar messages abound. An article in the monthly publication of the Ludwig Von Mises Institute states, "[c]an government schools be reformed? No."[98] Concluding that a

particular reform initiative has failed is one thing, but declaring in advance that all future reforms will fail is not only premature—it's arrogant and irresponsible.

VII. What Would Privatization Mean?

In Milton Friedman's essay, "Public Schools: Make Them Private," he called for "privatization to the point at which a substantial fraction of all educational service is rendered to individuals by private enterprises." Moreover, he continued, privatization "would produce a new, highly active and profitable private industry."[99]

Indeed, the potential windfall that entrepreneurs envision from a fully privatized educational system is quite alluring: K-12 education is a $350 billion industry.[100]

Across the country, space in many private schools—particularly the elite academies—is highly limited. For a variety of reasons, many existing private schools are unlikely to expand to accommodate significant numbers of additional students in a privatized system. Many of these schools would fear the changes that an influx of new students from public schools would bring to their educational environment. Others might choose to retain highly selective admission standards.

In the days after the Supreme Court's 2002 school voucher decision, Chester E. Finn, Jr., who heads the Fordham Foundation, noted that private schools generally reacted unenthusiastically. Finn said that private school operators were "so diffident" for several reasons, including their doubts that they can "succeed with larger numbers of disadvantaged" students. Finn also noted that it is generally hard to find private school leaders "who want their schools to grow, to open additional campuses, to recruit more clients. Most seem content to stick with what they are doing," he said, even if it means having a waiting list for admissions.[101] Finn also recently admitted that "there aren't enough private schools to go around" for would-be voucher students.[102]

The Cato Institute's David Salisbury recently argued that private schools' ability to disregard these state standards is "the very basis for school choice."

While religious schools are generally considered more willing to accommodate students than non-sectarian private schools, the evidence suggests that they, too, would turn away many students who now attend public schools. Catholic schools already reject a majority of their applicants.[103] In 2002, a Catholic school official in Cleveland stated that the city's Catholic schools "often investigate students' backgrounds" and consider academic and behavioral issues in deciding which students are accepted.[104]

To serve the millions of children, a privatized system of education would require a massive number of new schools to be organized to replace all or most of the more than 92,000 public schools operating across America.[105] Of course, opening new schools is a time-consuming and expensive task and it's safe to assume that a reasonable share of these newly formed private schools would fail. Consider, for example, that during the

first five years of the Milwaukee voucher program, nearly one out of four voucher schools closed its doors. Three voucher schools actually ceased operations during the course of the school year, disrupting the education of their students and forcing parents to scramble to find new schools.[106]

Additionally, many observers are rightly concerned about the quality of the thousands of 'start-up' schools that would be launched. Even Mary Hercher, who heads a Florida private school serving voucher students, voiced serious misgivings about some of the private schools that have opened across the state seeking taxpayer dollars. "I fear that some are jumping on the bandwagon and figuring on making some easy money," she said.[107] Florida State Senator Alex Villalobos has publicly opposed a statewide voucher program in which "hastily created so-called private schools, with no accountability for educational outcomes, are tempted to lure children in large numbers from good public schools just to make a profit."[108]

More than 20 years ago, Education Week writer Gerald Grant explained a reality that seemed to escape Friedman's market analysis. "Good schools are good communities," wrote Grant, "and these are not instantaneous creations that can be thrown up like a chain of '7-11' stores."[109]

Accountability

Concerns about quality are magnified by the fact that private and religious schools are not held accountable in the same ways as public schools under local, state and federal laws. For example, public schools are overseen by school boards whose members are elected or appointed by elected officials. School boards are required by law to hold open meetings, and they operate under bylaws that outline procedures for gaining public input and reaching decisions. By contrast, private schools aren't required to have a governance body that operates democratically or opens its meetings to the public. While public schools must make budget and financial records available to parents and taxpayers, private schools are under no such obligation.

Permitting privately funded private schools to operate in this manner may, indeed, be acceptable to some policymakers. In fact, [110]

Inadequate oversight has enabled some disturbing conditions to linger for months or even years at a number of private schools participating in voucher programs. Although private voucher schools operate under somewhat unique rules in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Florida, some of these schools have been shown to share a wide range of accountability problems. Some of these problems include inappropriate student selection and unlawful admissions policies; hiring unqualified staff and staff with criminal records; misappropriation of public funds; failure to meet safety codes; unlawful discipline of students; and failure to provide adequate supplies for students and staff.[111]

Funding

Funding a privatized system is another issue that raises many questions that pro-privatization groups have yet to address. The Alliance for the Separation of School and

State claims that, under a fully privatized system, tax dollars that now go to public schools could be returned to people as a "tax cut," providing enough money to cover tuition for two-thirds of the nation's children at private schools. The Alliance offers no financial data that would explain how it arrived at this figure.

And what about the remaining one-third of school-age children? The Alliance has stated that it "can prudently predict an increase of $20-25 billion in charitable giving to assist the 1/3 of parents who will need help to cover part or most of the tuition."[112] Predictions about charitable giving may be easy to make, but actual giving can fall short of such predictions depending on fluctuating external factors such as the economy, disasters, and politics. Permitting the education of millions of children each year to ride on such uncertainty would be incredibly irresponsible.[113]

The Alliance neglects to mention the inequities that would occur in private school voucher programs. It is likely that low income families would be unable to complete for slots in elite private academies with wealthy families whose financial resources give them greater access to the best schools.

Many private schools, especially religious schools, are already relying heavily on fundraising appeals. A researcher studying California's private schools noted that these schools "already face cruel market forces. Despite their fund-raising efforts, they can only afford to pay teachers two-thirds the average earnings of public school teachers."[114]

While public school critics point to the steadily increasing costs of public schools, private schools are facing their own financial pressures. When examining private schools in the nation's capital and surrounding suburbs, the Washington Post found that financial aid costs for parents of private-school students have risen dramatically due, in part, to "persistent tuition increases that have nearly doubled the cost of a private school education in just a decade."[115] A spokesperson for the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) acknowledged last year that private schools "are totally worried" about these financial trends.[116]

VIII. Education: Just Another Market?

Some reform advocates have rightly urged public schools to redouble their efforts to treat parents and the communities they serve as valued customers. However, supporters of a privatized educational system take this point to the extreme, relying on weak analogies to support their case. For example, CATO has claimed that greater "consumer choice" in education would force schools to improve. "If a grocery store starts to sell bad food, it will lose customers."[117] But this analogy ignores an obvious distinction. Judging whether food is bad is largely a matter of personal taste, and most people know immediately what tastes good or bad to them. Judging whether a school is bad, however, can require many weeks or even months of interacting with teachers and administrators, and monitoring the progress and experiences of students.

Making accurate judgments about whether a particular school is good or bad would not be a simple exercise in a privatized system. Even now, private schools are generally not

required by law to release student test scores, teacher certification data, governance documents, or financial statements to the public. This is also true of private schools receiving tax dollars through publicly funded voucher programs in Ohio, Wisconsin and Florida. Colorado, which just passed a voucher law in April[118], offers a glaring example of the disparity between the information that public and private schools provide to parents and taxpayers.

Since September 2001, Colorado parents and taxpayers have been able to receive detailed information about any public school in the state. The state Department of Education's "School Accountability Reports" site includes information on each public school's student enrollment, overall academic performance, student attendance rates, test scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program, safety and discipline incidents, student-teacher ratios, teacher qualifications, and financial condition.[119] These data even tell a parent or taxpayer how many teachers and administrators are employed by a specific school, and whether a school conducts home visits, operates after-school programs, or has a "closed campus."[120] Colorado's private schools are not required by state law to make any of this information public.[121]

Ironically, some of the very conditions in public schools that critics identify as problems are rooted in the very dynamics of the free market system they praise.

While Colorado's new voucher law does require students attending private schools with vouchers to be tested, participating private schools will not be required to report all the academic and related information that public schools must report.[122] Moreover, even as they speak of the need for competition, the fervent supporters of vouchers adamantly oppose virtually all efforts to make private schools equally accountable as public schools.[123] In a recently published book about vouchers, Frederick Hess has noted that "education competition cannot be divorced from discussions about testing, teacher certification, school governance, educational administration, or the other frustrating conversations that many [voucher] proponents have long wished to avoid."[124]

Too Different or Too Similar to the Market?

For example, the Alliance for the Separation of School and State has complained that the typical public school is serving far too many children.[125] Yet large schools were inspired largely by private enterprise, which has long rewarded "economies of scale" that centralize operations to maximize efficiency,[126] a fact overlooked by the Alliance and its supporters.

Indeed, one could argue that public schools may have been influenced too heavily by the free market. Boston University professor Philip Tate has observed that rigid class schedules, reliance on test scores and other traits of public schools "were instituted in the name of efficiency" and created a "factory model" of schooling.[127]

Years before he was elected to Congress, republican Tom Tancredo wrote that "in a true free market of educational services, there would be no need for anyone to flee their neighborhoods. Entrepreneurs go to where their market exists."[128] Yet this assertion is at odds with reality. Private companies often identify their markets based on cost efficiencies, demographics and other factors that enhance their ability to turn a profit. This may explain why many low-income, inner-city neighborhoods across America are undeserved by grocery stores, shopping malls, and other retailers. Evidence suggests that these communities would be equally underserved in a privatized educational system. In fact, by the late 1990s, two of the leading for-profit school management companies vowed to redirect their outreach efforts to suburban public school districts.[129]

Moreover, Tancredo's contention is undercut by his own allies. The Heritage Foundation, for example, has asserted that "one reason private schools outperform public schools is that they can exclude students who aren't suited for the school's educational approach."[130] This fact serves as a reminder that, despite claims to the contrary, it is private schools that exercise the real 'choice' in voucher programs, not parents.

"They can say what they want, but I've never seen a situation where low-income people, when they have to compete in education with people with far more resources, come out equal."
Polly Williams
Former Milwaukee voucher advocate

The marketplace is a volatile, unstable world. Despite claims by some ultra-conservative writers that poor or disadvantaged children would fare well under a privatized system, their supposed allies offer no reassurance for this view. Sheldon Richman—an author and fierce critic of public schools — has written, "We cannot predict in any detail what would arise in a free market in education."[131] Edison's John E. Chubb amplified this point, noting that "the workings of markets are not so simple in practice, and markets come with their own set of challenges."[132] Chubb neglects to elaborate on what those challenges are or which families or children are likely to confront those challenges.

Polly Williams, who led the charge to create the Milwaukee voucher program, has offered words of caution for a system that would leave educational opportunity to the vagaries of the marketplace: [133]

In the marketplace, for better and for worse, the bottom line is profit. This view has been stated with equal candor by Ohio businessman David Brennan, the author of Cleveland's voucher law. "Education is first, last and always a business. If it's run like a business, it can be done profitably," Brennan said a few years ago. Brennan should know -- he closed the doors of his first two private schools only three years after they opened.[134] Unfortunately, free market advocates like Brennan seemingly fail to grasp the fact that the processes of teaching and learning have little in common with manufacturing and selling consumer goods.

IX. Those Whom the 'Market' Would Leave Behind

Students With Disabilities

Before Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, as few as one in five children with disabilities received the education assistance he or she needed - and as many of a million children were barred from attending school at all. [135] Today, 6.5 million students across the country benefit from this landmark civil rights legislation.[136] But moving toward a mostly or fully privatized system of education could turn back the clock for the millions of today's school-age children with disabilities who depend on IDEA.

Given IDEA's importance to millions of students and their families, a few important questions need to be asked. Would a privatized educational system truly serve all students? Or would it cater to those students who were believed to be easier or less expensive to educate? The Heritage Foundation expressed the hope that "vouchers could limit how much taxpayers must pay to educate the disabled and begin a movement toward cost containment."[137] When Mike Petrilli, a spokesman for the Fordham Foundation, was asked how a private-voucher system for special education students would be structured, Petrilli said it "would probably end up looking like a managed health-care plan where an HMO decides how much to pay for each procedure."[138]

If publicly funded voucher programs offer a preview of coming attractions, students with disabilities would be in a precarious situation under a privatized system of education. Indeed, in the two urban voucher programs that are funded by public tax dollars, many private schools are either unable or unwilling to educate children with special needs. This should have come as no surprise to top officials and policymakers. In fact, in the first year of the Cleveland voucher program, Ohio businessman David Brennan wrote to then-Governor George Voinovich, informing him that "none of the existing private schools will be able to handle a seriously handicapped child."[139] Years later, an Ohio Department of Education official was equally candid, reporting that many Catholic schools "are not equipped to handle handicapped children" or offer the services these children need.[140] This is significant since Catholic schools comprise a majority of the participating Cleveland voucher schools.[141]

Students with special needs have also met with a chilly reception in Milwaukee. Two years ago, Wisconsin officials found that only 8 percent of the city's voucher schools offered special education services.[142] While state law forbids Milwaukee's voucher schools from explicitly barring special needs students, these private schools offer no welcome mat for students with physical or learning disabilities, and the proof can be seen on Empowering Parents for Informed Choices—an online school database for Milwaukee parents.

On this Web site, for example, Emmaus Lutheran declares that it cannot serve students who have cognitive or learning disabilities, or are emotionally disturbed.[143] "Harambee Community School does not have special education teachers," reports another voucher school.[144] Blessed Sacrament explains that "students who are 2-3 years below grade level

cannot be realistically brought up to grade level" because the school lacks tutorial and other programs.[145] Imagine the uproar if a public school threw in the towel with that declaration. Yet another Milwaukee voucher school reports that it "cannot serve wheelchair-bound students."[146]

Even though Florida's McKay voucher program was specifically created for students with disabilities, the law is structured in a way that penalizes middle- and low-income parents who cannot afford to pay tuition or fees that typically exceed the voucher's face value. Additionally, participating private schools are not required to offer special education services and even those that do offer these services are not required—unlike public schools—to monitor students' progress.[147]

When education is left to the marketplace, the losers will be students considered "ineducable" or too expensive to teach.

Finally, it's worth noting that the vast majority of Florida's private schools have declined to participate in the McKay program, reflecting the views expressed earlier this year by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), a private schools group. NAIS President Pat Bassett told private school operators that he opposed voucher plans that would curb private schools' "freedom to accept students who are mission-appropriate ... our mission is to educate whatever population you define as your population ...."[148] In other words, private schools do the choosing, not parents.

The Other Children Left Behind

Of course, these experiences from voucher programs underscore a fundamental distinction: private schools, unlike public schools, are not required to educate every child. Moreover, a survey by the U.S. Department of Education of private schools in large inner-cities found that 85 percent of schools would "definitely or probably" not be willing to participate in a voucher program if they were required to accept "students with special needs such as learning disabilities, limited English proficiency, or low achievement." Among religious schools, 86 percent expressed this same unwillingness to participate.[149]

These survey results were reaffirmed in a Florida editorial noting that Jacksonville's "top private schools" were not participating in the state's voucher program. An official at one of these elite private schools explained that his school was unwilling to participate because, in the words of the pro-voucher editorial, it could require the private school to "accept a child who is not going to be successful ...."[150] For voucher supporters to presume that certain children cannot be successful is very disturbing—and revealing.

This troubling attitude has been echoed by other pro-voucher, pro-private school writers. William Rusher, the syndicated columnist and publisher of the National Review, recently wrote that there are some "essentially ineducable youngsters in the ghetto, on whom vouchers would simply be wasted. But there are plenty of bright ones, too ...."[151] Indeed, some advocates of a privatized educational system seem all too willing to write

off entire groups of America's children. In his book, The Twelve-Year Sentence, George Resch is amazingly cavalier. "So long as individuals, largely as a result of their biological inheritances, vary so greatly, equality of opportunity is simply not possible," he wrote. "What equality of opportunity can there be, for example, between two young people, one brilliantly intelligent and in vigorous good health and the other a mental dullard with a sickly constitution?"[152]

Last year, Ramon Cortines, the former superintendent of New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, revealed how determined many private schools are to close their doors to poor, disadvantaged kids: "Leaders of several prestigious private schools have said to me, 'Hey, we're not going to ever deal with those children. We'll just raise our fees.'"[153]

As noted earlier, equity is not a concern of most voucher supporters. Recent voucher bills introduced in Texas have been written to enable any family, including the wealthiest, to receive a taxpayer-funded voucher to attend a private or religious school. In fact, students already enrolled in private school would have first priority for enrollment.[154] Such proposals contradict the rhetoric from voucher advocates who would have the public believe that vouchers are specifically designed for low-income families.

As the Education Trust observed, "If market forces worked, rotten milk wouldn't cost twice as much in a bodega in East Harlem as fresh milk does downtown ... The market fails [poor] people again and again. So why do we think the market is going to work in educating their kids?"[155] As Arizona State University's Alex Molnar summed it up, "A market by definition can't address issues of equity."[156]

X. An Unreceptive Public

Major right-wing foundations and think tanks continue to launch a barrage of attacks against public schools, hoping to sever the bonds that have long connected the public and its public schools. For now, at least, these attacks seem to have had only limited impact. While pro-privatization groups present the superiority of private schools as an established fact, Americans as a whole recognize that many public schools perform as well or, in many cases, even better than private schools. When asked in a 2001 poll which schools in their community, public or private, held students to "higher standards," the result was a virtual tie: 35 percent chose private schools, and 34 percent chose public schools.[157] Interestingly, the private school advantage on this question dropped 19 points in the three years prior to 2001.

While a variety of groups seek to radically remake the educational system, the public has made its wishes clear on this issue. In a national poll this year, Americans chose "reforming the existing public school system" over "finding an alternative" to the current system by a 69-to-27 percent margin.[158]

Additionally, there are good reasons to believe that the public—if it were made fully aware of the deeper agenda that many leading voucher advocates have—would oppose taking the first step toward privatizing the educational system.

One barometer of the public's attitudes comes from comparing its feelings toward the public schools with how it feels toward private businesses, the institutions that would participate in the "industry" that Milton Friedman envisions. Bear in mind that over the past two decades, public education has received a steady stream of negative press coverage. While Americans in some communities are deeply concerned with the state of their public schools, overall support for public education remains high. In fact, in last year's annual Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup poll on education, 71 percent of public school parents gave a grade of A or B to the school attended by their oldest child.[159] Contrast this with a Princeton Survey Research (PSR) poll revealing that 58 percent of Americans felt that most business executives try to find a way around the laws governing their profession—one sign that pro-privatization groups are likely to face an uphill battle in promoting their agenda.[160] It is worth noting that the PSR poll was conducted before officials at WorldCom made front-page headlines by publicly disclosing the company's misleading accounting practices.[161]

Finally, in last year's Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup poll, 65 percent surveyed said they would oppose a plan in which their local school board "contract[ed] with private profit-making corporations to run the entire operations of the public schools" in their community.[162]

Even if the American people do not embrace vouchers or educational privatization, the loosely knit, right-wing coalition seeking to privatize education is thinking long-term and is unlikely to give up. "We don't even know what event will trigger the collapse of support for government schools," declares the Alliance for the Separation of School & State's Web site. "What we do know is we are further along than most people think." (emphasis in original)[163]

XI. Conclusion

"It would be the ultimate irony of modern history," the Center on Education Policy has written, "if America should dissolve the unifying glue of public education and splinter along ethnic and religious lines just at the time that many of the world's emerging democracies are looking to the United States and its institutions as role models for building their nations."[164]

David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, has warned, "Any arrangement that makes our schools less public will have serious consequences — not only for schools but for an entire country that was organized around the expectation that there would always be public education to 'complete the great work of the American Revolution.'"[165]

Horace Mann, the father of American public school education, believed fervently that the nation had a strong interest in establishing a system of free, public, non-sectarian schools whose doors were open to all children. The man whose efforts also led to the establishment of a public library system in Massachusetts once said, "Be ashamed to die before you have won some battle for humanity."[166] The real battle—for the very system of education that Mann helped establish and nurture—is likely to intensify in the months and years ahead.

APPENDIX I

The following is a summary of elected officials, right-wing leaders and other prominent individuals who have signed the Alliance for the Separation of School and State's anti-public school proclamation, or who have publicly offered support to the Alliance. The group's proclamation declares: "I proclaim publicly that I favor ending government involvement in education."[167]

John K. Andrews, Colorado state senator and 1990 Republican nominee for governor.[168]
Joel Belz, publisher of *World* magazine.
David Boaz, executive vice-president of the Cato Institute.
Steve Buckstein, president of the Oregon-based Cascade Institute.
Dean Clancy, executive director of the President's Council on Bioethics and a senior policy adviser to former U.S. House Majority Leader Dick Armey (D-Tex.)[169]
Alice Click, West Virginia director of Concerned Women for America.
Ed Crane, president of the Cato Institute.
William Dannemeyer, former member of the U.S. House of Representative (R-Calif.).[170]
Joey Davis, Missouri director of Concerned Women for America.
Douglas Dewey, executive vice president of the Children's Scholarship Fund, which raises money to send students to private schools.[171]
Dinesh D'Souza, research fellow at the Hoover Institution and author of the books *Illiberal Education* (1991) and *What's So Great About America* (2002).
David Dunn, research and policy director for the Oklahoma Family Policy Council.
M. Stanton Evans, Ultra-conservative author, and American Conservative Union board member.
Ezola Foster, author who served as the vice-presidential running-mate for 2000 Reform Party nominee Pat Buchanan.
Jay Grimstead, activist in the Christian Reconstruction movement and founder/director of the Coalition on Revival.[172]
Karen Hayes, Illinois director of Concerned Women for America.
David R. Henderson, research fellow at the Hoover Institution.
Jacob Hornberger, president of the Future of Freedom Foundation.
Brannon Howse, president of the American Family Policy Institute.
D. James Kennedy, televangelist and founder of the Center for Reclaiming America, which helped organize the anti-abortion campaign "Shake the Nation Back to Life."
Tim LaHaye, author of numerous books, including *The Battle for the Public Schools*, husband of Concerned Women for America leader Beverly LaHaye, and the man credited by the Rev. Jerry Falwell for helping to inspire the birth of the Religious Right movement.[172]
Susan Lintner, Connecticut director of Concerned Women for America.
Peg Luksik, Chairman of the National Parents Commission and anti-abortion candidate for Pennsylvania governor in 1998.
J. Stanley Marshall, founding chairman of the Florida-based James Madison Institute.
Sandi Martinez, Massachusetts director of Concerned Women for America.
Tom Monaghan, founder of Domino's Pizza and a major contributor to right-wing causes.
William Murchison, columnist, *Dallas Morning News*.
Marvin Olasky, University of Texas journalism professor and informal adviser to George W. Bush during the 2000 campaign. He is often referred to as the "godfather of compassionate conservatism."[174]
Nancy O'Toole, president of Eagle Forum of Massachusetts.
Ron Paul, member of the U.S. House of Representatives (R-Tex.).
Howard Phillips, chairman of the Conservative Caucus, a former senior official at the Republican National Committee, and director of the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity under President Nixon.[175]
Larry Pratt, president of Gun Owners of America.
Charles E. Rice, professor at Notre Dame Law School
Ron Robinson, president of Young America's Foundation.
Lew Rockwell, president of the Ludwig von Mises Institute.
Don Rogers, former California state senator.

R. J. Rushdoony, author of *The Institutes of Biblical Law* and a leader (until his death in 2001) of the radical Christian Reconstruction movement, which seeks to replace civil law with Biblical law.[176]
Sam Slom, Hawaii state senator.
Fred L. Smith, Jr., president of the Competitive Enterprise Institute.
Judy Smith, Kansas director of Concerned Women for America.
Richard L. Stroup, former Reagan administration official and a senior associate at the Center for Free Market Environmentalism, which opposes a variety of federal efforts to protect environmental quality.[177]
Tom Tancredo, member of the U.S. House of Representatives (R-Colo.).[178]
Robert Teegarden, associate director for education of the California Catholic Conference.
David Theroux, founder and president of the Independent Institute.
Vanita Warren, Colorado director of Concerned Women for America.

ENDNOTES

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[154] Texas House Bills 293 and 658 (Subchapter J. Public Education Voucher Pilot Program, Section 29.356, paragraph e.) state: "A private school may give preference to an enrolled student to achieve continuity and to siblings of an enrolled student or children residing in the same household as an enrolled student for the convenience of the parents of those children." Texas House Bill 2465 (Subchapter J., Education Freedom Program, Section 29.356, paragraph b.) states: "However, to achieve continuity in education, a school may give preference among scholarship applicants to previously enrolled students and to other children residing in the same household as previously enrolled students."

[155] "School Colors: The Racial Politics of Public Education," *The Nation*, June 5, 2000, p. 14.

[156] Julie Light, "The Education Industry: The Corporate Takeover of Public Schools," posted July 8, 1998 on CorpWatch, accessed at http://www.corpwatch.org/issues/PID.jsp?articleid=889

[157] "Reality Check 2001" was sponsored by Public Agenda and *Education Week*. During November and December of 2000, Public Agenda interviewed national random samples of: 601 K-12 public school teachers; 602 parents with children currently attending public school in grades K-12; 600 public school students in middle or high school; 251 employers who make hiring decisions for employees recently out of high school or college; and 254 college professors at two- and four-year colleges who taught freshmen or sophomores in the last two years. The margin of error for teachers, parents and students is +/- 4 percent, and for employers and college professors it is +/- 6 percent.

[158] Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 34th Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools." The poll of 1,000 adults was conducted June 5-26, 2002; a copy of the poll can be accessed at www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0209pol.htm.

[159] Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 34th Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools." The poll of 1,000 adults was conducted June 5-26, 2002, a copy of the poll can be accessed at www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0209pol.htm.

[160] Summary is from: Ruy Teixeira, "Public Opinion Watch," week of March 18-22, 2002, The Century Foundation; the poll of 2,002 adults was conducted February 2 thru March 10, 2002, by Pew Research Center.

[161] The Princeton Survey Research poll was conducted in March 2002, while WorldCom announced in June 2002 that the company's accounting practices had hidden nearly $4 billion in expenses.

[162] Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 34th Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools." The poll of 1,000 adults was conducted June 5-26, 2002, a copy of the poll can be accessed at http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0209pol.htm.

[163] Taken from the text on the home page of the Alliance for the Separation of School and State, "Can We Achieve Our Goal?" accessed at http://www.scpschool.org.

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[164] "Public Schools and Citizenship by the Center on Education Policy," July 1998.
[165] David Mathews' professional title and biography is available at the Kettering Foundation's Web site at http://www.kettering.org; Mathews' quote is cited from the essay: "A Sense of Civic Involvement: Education for Living Well Politically," Appalachian Collaborative Center for Learning, Assessment and Instruction in Mathematics, Ohio University, November 2002, available at http://kant.citl.ohiou.edu/ACCLAIM/rc/rc_sub/vlibrary/8_placev/Pvessay2.pdf.
[166] "Educational Contributions of Horace Mann," College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, North Carolina State University, accessed at the university's Web site http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/aee501/mann.html.
[167] For a more comprehensive list of prominent people who have signed the Alliance proclamation, go to http://www.sepschool.org/VIPList.html.
[168] Mark Obmascik, "Tancredo Signs Pledge to Dump Public Schools," *The Denver Post*, February 23, 1999.
[169] Biographical information on Clancy is available from People For the American Way Foundation and the University of Texas' Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/faculty/warner/uninsured/bios.html.
[170] Dannemeyer delivered a speech entitled "Religious People Can Retake the Schools" at the Alliance's November 1998 conference, see: "Time to End All 'Public' Schools?," a news release by the Alliance for the Separation of Church & State Alliance, 1998, available at http://www.sepschool.org/SepCon/98/release.html.
[171] The Children's Scholarship Fund home page, available at http://www.scholarshipfund.org/index.asp, accessed June 30, 2003.
[172] A document published by the Coalition on Revival declared that "education ought to operate in a free market" and opposed tax support for public schools unless home schooling and private schools also received tax support. (Lappert, Simonds, Grimstead and Beisner, "The Christian World View of Education," 1999, Coalition on Revival, p. 16.) accessed at http://www.reformation.net/cor/cordocs/educ.pdf June 27, 2003.
[173] Falwell's views of LaHaye are noted in: Jane Lampman, "Apocalyptic -And Atop the Bestseller Lists," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 29, 2002, available at http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0829/p14s01-lire.htm, accessed June 30, 2003.
[174] Marvin Olasky Biography, available at: www.townhall.com/columnists/BIO/cbolasky.htm and Poppy Dixon Book Review: Compassionate Conservatism, available at: www.Jesus21.com.
[175] Howard Phillips Biography, available at: www.conservativeusa.org
[176] In 2001, right-wing columnist Gary North noted that a foundation started by Rushdoony had been identified "as the think tank of the Religious Right." (Gary North, "R.J. Rushdoony, R.I.P." a column posted February 10, 2001 on LewRockwell.com, accessed at www.lewrockwell.com/north/north33.html.) In an interview before his death, Rushdoony was asked: "What about the idea that the government should be neutral and should recognize that we live in a democratic, pluralistic society?" Rushdoony's reply began this way: "Our Lord said, 'Occupy until I come.' We are told that the kingdoms of this world must become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." ("An Interview With R.J. Rushdoony," conducted by Joseph McAuliffe, The Second American Revolution, accessed at www.forerunner.com/revolution/rush.html.) In a 1994 interview, Rushdoony said that even in some fundamentalist Christian colleges "the faculties are evil." ("Interview With R.J. Rushdoony," *Contra Mundum*, No. 13, Fall 1994; accessed at www.vsi.com/~contra_m//cm/interviews/cm13_interview.html.)
[177] Staff Biographies, The Center for Free Market Environmentalism, available at: www.perc.org
[178] Mark Obmascik, "Tancredo Signs Pledge to Dump Public Schools," *The Denver Post*, February 23, 1999, p. B-3.

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The Deeper Agenda to Privatize Public Education

People For the American Way Foundation conducts research, examines the impact of public policy, builds coalitions in states and local communities, and takes legal action in support of the values and institutions that sustain our diverse, democratic society.

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